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ABSTRACT

This paper delineates some desirable characteristics of illustrations for children's books about minorities. After noting that many contemporary book illustrations are expressionistic and should not be interpreted in a literal manner, the paper discusses the following qualities that should characterize illustrations of minority people: the illustrations should depict individuals from the diverse cultural groups involved in universal experiences; the individuals from the diverse groups should be shown participating in, or functioning according to, the traditions or salient shared experiences most commonly retained by the members of their culture group; the illustrations should offer the readers positive and authentic images of individuals; they should depict all types and classes of people within a single culture group; and each individual should be portrayed in a variety of realistic situations and should exhibit unique characteristics. The paper cites many specific book illustrations that exemplify the characteristics discussed and includes a bibliography of the books cited. (GW)

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IMAGES OF MINORITIES IN THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS

BY

PATRICIA JEAN CIANCIOLO

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A number of years ago I worked in Puebla, Mexico and my assignment was to teach teachers how to teach English as a second language to elementary school children ages four through fourteen. Much of the instruction that I did was by way of demonstrations, using the students of these teachers right in their own classrooms. Because of my numerous contacts with these children I got to know many of them very well. In the process of getting to know them and also having the privilege of living in Puebla for this extended period of time, I think I learned a great deal about these children. I learned things about them which highlighted each one as a beautifully unique individual, I learned a great deal about the ways and "personality" of the contemporary native Puebla Mexican people. I learned more thoroughly also that people are people and have many qualities in common.

A few days before I left Mexico, I bought a painting. The subject of this painting was three children. I thought the artist captured the zest, the enthusiasm, the openness to life that the children I worked with in Puebla so often expressed. Shown in this picture of three children, one child is reading a book and two others are watching -- in envy, or awe or attention. Whatever interpretation the viewer brings to the children's expressions continues to this day to be the subject of discussion of anyone who sees the painting. It is painted by Tajoney, a noted Mexican artist and its price was more than my means at that time really permitted. But the painting was so pleasing to me (in color, style of art, as well as in content) and also very meaningful to me,

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I made the great decision, bought it and arranged to have it sent to my home in Michigan. By the time it finally arrived (four months later) all my friends and colleagues had heard about it - - in great detail. I could hardly wait for them to see it. The first person to see the painting when it finally did arrive was less than enthusiastic about it. She said as she viewed it displayed so obviously above the fireplace in my living room, "Well, when you get tired of it you can always take it to the office. Mexican children certainly don't look like that. I wouldn't buy anything like that - even for my office!" I was crushed. She had absolutely no feel for the many qualities in that painting which I found so pleasing, beautiful and meaningful.

My point in telling this story is really two-fold. First, One's response to art -- whether it is to a painting or illustrations in a book -- is largely personal and subjective. What causes one to prefer one piece of art over another, to consider it a beautiful, artistic and/or unique statement are the affective human elements as well as one's knowledge and background experience or exposure to art. Secondly, response to modern art calls for more than a literal depiction of a scene or an experience, it is more than a mirroring of nature and of what one sees. It is an expression of a person's thoughts and feelings. Also it should arouse in the viewer an enjoyment that is long lasting. It should cause one to stop and look, and then look again. Each time seeing something of greater depth and breadth in the thought as well as the emotion(s) portrayed in it. Thus, people's responses to art should be typified by at least two characteristics, namely lack of conformity and lack of predictability. In other words, they should be individual responses and should be subjective and personal responses.

The diverse responses of the literary reviewers and critics to Harriet

and the Promised Land by Jacob Lawrence dramatize these characteristics about responses to art. Harriet of the Promised Land is a landmark among the juvenile books about black history and among picture books in which expressionistic paintings are used to illustrate the text. Among the reviewers and critics who decided this book was addressed to the "young reading audience" and/or were inclined to interpret the art as well as the text for this narrative verse at the literal level, the responses were devistatingly negative. On the other hand, among those who recognized that the intended reading audience included mature and thoughtful juveniles and adults the responses were very positive. Their comments indicated that (1) they recognized that Jacob Lawrence expressed ideas and intense emotions and feelings by way of sophisticated expressionistic paintings, (2) the narrative verse and the illustrations pertains to and comments about aspects of black history and the Old Testament in particular and the human condition in general, and(3) the symbolism in it is associated with the intolerable conditions (dehumanizing conditions) people face from day to day as well as those associated with aspects of black history.

Even though subjectivity plays a big role in affecting one's response to and evaluation of art (and, illustrations should be considered art!) there are some tenets that characterize excellence in art. I will attempt to delineate some of the qualities (criteria or characteristics) which one should look for when evaluating the illustrations in children's books about minorities. Do keep in mind that as precise and objective as these criteria may appear, the responses and evaluations of the individuals who use them with any one book will indeed vary.

SOME SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVALUATING ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations and fine Art Pieces. A comparison of the paintings hanging

in fine arts galleries with the illustrations in contemporary books will demonstrate that illustrators like other visual artists go well beyond a literal depiction of the reality of a scene in a story. The illustrations do indeed convey the spirit of the literary pieces being illustrated but like the paintings in the galleries they are also strong expressive works of art in their own right. Each illustrator uses his or her picture to make a personal kind of statement. One will see in these illustrations truly artistic statements done in all art styles, representational, expressionistic, impressionistic, cartoon, naive art, folk art and surrealistic. Thus, there is now little distinction between fine and commercial art. It follows then that when evaluating illustrations in terms of the kind of image(s) they portray of minority people, it is important to recognize that they cannot be interpreted on the literal level. Indeed, reflective and sophisticated dimensions for interpretation and response must be used to come to grips with an artist's graphic comments about the minority people who are the subject of his pictures. The modern expressive art styles present in contemporary book illustrations simply do not lend themselves to literal imterpretation.

There are many contemporary book illustrators besides Jacob Lawrence who use modern art styles. Alexis Deveaux, a black woman poet, playwright and artist, used the surrealistic style in her ink drawings that illustrate her own literary piece entitled Na-ni. This is a very sad account about the little girl who could not get her much wanted bicycle because her black "brother" stole the welfare check from the mail box. These highly stylized drawings are a perfect match for this literary protest about people's cruelty to each other and about shattered dreams. In fact, they serve to reiterate the dehumanizing, hostile environment referred to in Na-ni. Action-filled, exhuberant and

virile charcoal and wash drawings by the late Mozelle Thompson illustrate the Negro National Anthem written in 1900 by Janes Weldon Johnson and his brother John Rosamond and entitled Lift Every Voice and Sing. These black and white illustrations are in the expressionistic art style and highlight the emotions of faith, courage, hope and joy so very present in this hymn.

Whatever their techniques or art styles happen to be, illustrators, like the writers do make a particular and individual statement, be that a statement of fact, fiction and/or attitude. No less than writers, illustrators are essentially storytellers. They use pictures instead of words. Their artistic talent is but a tool to achieve that end.[1]

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[1] Walter Lorraine. "On Illustration - My View," Calendar of the Children's Book Council 34: unpaged (March-August, 1975

THE CONTENT OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF MINORITY PEOPLE

Universal experiences: The illustrations should depict individuals from the diverse culture groups participating in and functioning as all people do regardless of their cultural affiliation and background. In other words, they should depict individuals involved in universal experiences. There seems to be little or no problem finding picture books or novels that meet this criterion. For example, consider the illustrations prepared by Leo Carty for Sidewalk Story written by Sharon Bell Mathis which is a story about experiences shared oftentimes by poor people living in the inner city. Carty's representational black and white charcoal and pencil sketches add considerable depth to the significance of this commentary about friendship and the plight of an impoverished black family who is victimized by an impersonal, insensitive and uncaring society. John Steptoe, using a style strongly suggestive of Georges Rouault meets this

criterion in the texts and illustrations for his own books about black children namely Stevie, Train Ride and My Best Special Words. So do the illustrations he prepared for She Come Bringing Me That Little Baby Girl by Eloise Greenfield. For example, in the last named book children regardless of their race, nationality, religion or sex would recognize and appreciate Kevin's feelings of jealousy and rejection when his parents, relatives and neighbors fussed over his new baby sister. They will also recognize his protective and possessive attitudes towards her when his friends come to see her.

Salient Shared Experiences: If one is to offer books that help children understand and value the cultural pluralism in the American Society, the individuals from the diverse groups should be depicted participating in or functioning according to the traditions and/or salient shared experiences most commonly retained by the members of their culture group today. For example in the research conducted by Rosalie Black Kiah[2] it was found that

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[2]Rosalie Black Kiah. "A Content Analysis of Children's Contemporary Realistic Fiction About Black People in the United States to Determine If and How a Sampling of These Stories Portray Selected Shared Experiences of Black People." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State Universith, East Lansing, Michigan, 1976.

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among the salient shared experiences of Black people, strong kinship bonds were valued and protective attitudes toward kin and others who are not blood related are exhibited. Often times, then the Black people augment the nuclear family absorbing kin as well as non-blood related members into their home. Furthermore, there is considerable flexibility in the roles assumed and the emphasis is on the importance of the role rather than upon who performs it. These salient shared experiences and/or traditions should be portrayed in a way that one will recognize the positive and negative consequences they have

upon the people who are forced to or choose to retain them in their life style or code of ethics. Admittedly, the writer of the text would usually present facts and attitudes such as these. It should be remembered the illustrator can and should present them, too. Unfortunately, the research solidly demonstrates that there are very few books, proportionately, in which either authors or illustrators actually portray and come to grips with salient shared experiences and/or traditions of any one minority people. Most of the books about minorities depict members of these diverse groups in universal experiences. There are few fine examples to be found among the contemporary literary pieces for children in which the illustrators do depict the salient shared experiences and traditions of minorities. Worthy of note are the following: Kazue Mizumura does a fine job with her colored pencil sketches depicting Japanese children, past and present, participating in the still popular weather game as it is described in A Pair of Red Clogs written by Masako Matsuno. The beautiful relationship between a young boy and his very elderly and fragile great, great aunt is highlighted in the moving and stunning monochromatic representational water color paintings that Leo and Diane Dillon made to illustrate the award winning book entitled The Hundred Penny Box by Sharon Bell Mathis. Steptoe's All Us Come Cross The Water also portray's the positive relationship between kin of different generations. The illustrations that Nonny Hogrogian prepared for Virginia Hamilton's The Time Ago Tales of Jahdu are black and white crayon drawings. The illustrations that Black artist Ray Prather did for Ms. Hamilton's sequel Time Ago Lost: More Tales of Jahdu are black and white water color paintings. The two sets of illustrations for the Hamilton books are so different from each other but both dramatize the traditions and salient experiences shared by Black people in the United States today.

Offer Positive and Authentic Images: There is a substantial amount of solid research which demonstrates that illustrations have an effect on the viewer. We know for example, that book illustrations provide an important and effective means by which one may learn facts, attitudes and values about oneself and others. An illustration can show the reader new ways of seeing, it can sharpen (as well as shape) his view, it can give him a deeper understanding of the relationships between people who are like him or different from him. It is important, therefore, for book selectors to keep in mind that when they select books about the many and diverse groups which make up our society, the illustrations should portray facts, attitudes and values that will offer the readers positive and authentic images of individuals who are members of each of these diverse culture groups.

Seldom, if ever, does one find a firmly fixed conception of the attributes for old persons of a particular culture group. Therefore, the illustrations should depict all types and classes of people within a single culture group. All Black people are not residing in a ghetto, all Mexican Americans are not migrant workers, all Italians are not shoe repair specialists or owners of fruit stands, nor are all Chinese operators of laundry's. The features of most ethnic and racial minority groups are identifiable. Nonetheless, within each of these groups, individuals will display a wide variety of racial traits. The illustrator must highlight these common and unique features when depicting his characters. It is important, if one is to view oneself in an adequate and positive manner, he should see himself as a Negro, a Chinese, a Chicano portrayed in a manner that will permit him to recognize himself as a member of his particular racial or ethnic group as well as an individual with features, stature and body build that are definitely unique to him/ Thus there should be illustrations that offer each member of each of the diverse culture groups a fair

abundance of models upon which one who is a member could build a valid and positive self image. Illustrated books abound in which the black or brown or yellow child sees all types and classes of Caucasians. In these illustrations each of these Caucasians exhibit identifiable Caucasian characteristics, but they also exhibit a wide diversity of Caucasian racial traits. One's self concept and concept of others is strengthened by seeing an individual of any one race portrayed in a variety of realistic situations and exhibiting features and qualities that are unique to that person. Such diversity in the illustrations permits one to react to that person as an individual and is not conditioned to focus on or rely on stereotyping and scapegoating to build one's self esteem. When children understand, respect and admire diversity they need not fear or view with disdain, differences in color, status or life style.

It is quite promising to notice that at this point in time there are numerous books which depict diverse culture groups in positive and acceptable ways. Admittedly, there do exist some contemporary publications in which the opposite is so. Consider the illustrations that Ed Young prepared for Robert Wyndham's compilation of Chinese Mother Goose Rymes. Apparently, the illustrator was attempting to depict the chinese child of past generations in activities and situations suggested by these rymes and songs. There is no real problem with this. The problem -- and it is a serious one, I think, lies in the fact that he failed in his attempt to illustrate them with modern paintings that are adaptations of a classical style. His modern renditions of these witty nonsense verses, humorous poems, brain teasing riddles and amusing games, serve only to portray the Chinese as pigtailed, komono-garbed, slant-eyed simpletons. In contrast to this devastating visual commentary, one need only examine the illustrations created by Taro Yashimo for Umbrella or Crow Boy. His

illustrations are impressionistic in style. He highlights the features identifiable to the Japanese but his illustrations also exhibit a wide variety of Japanese but his illustrations also exhibit a wide variety of Japanese racial traits. The same would be true of the many books about Black people. The racial feature common to Black people are present in the black and white and pink pencil drawings that illustrate Eloise Greenfield's humorour and tender family story, entitled First Pink Light. Nonetheless, each member of this family is depicted with features that are unique to him or her and thus portraying the individual person that each one really is. The line drawings that Harold L. James prepared for Mira! Mari! by Dawn C. Thomas demonstrate that each of the Puerto Ricans involved in this story are individuals in their own right -- possessing individual features, personalities, and experiences. These concepts about individuality are very important to this story about Ramon's adventures and attitudes when arriving from warm and sunny Puerto Rico to a metropolitan city like New York in the winter. In A New Day, Don Bolognese individualized the racial features of Mexican Americans, too.

There are not very many literary selections (fictional or poetry) in which contemporary Orientals or American Indians are depicted either positively, authentically or at all. One will find a Korean child the subject of a poem about a frightened and conforming child in The Geranium On The Window Sill Just Died But Teacher You Went Right On by Albert Cullum. The cover of Norma Klein's new book What It's All About was painted by Charles Lilly and verifies that this is a serious yet somewhat witty novel about a Vietnamese orphan who is adopted by an American family that eventually breaks up. The series about the North American Indians, written by Dan Jacobson classifies this racial group -- according to modes of survival -- The Fishermen, The Hunters, The Gatherers and The Farmers. Although most of the texts and illustrations focus on the ways and means of the Indians of the past, there is considerable attention

given to the contemporary members of what Jacobson has called "The most neglected minority". The blacn-and-white line-and wash representational illustrations by Richard Cuffari are very fine companions to this authentic and positive anthropoligical series. The most outstanding visual artist of the American Indian is George Catlin and examples of his work are found in a biogrophy of Catlin entitled, Indian Gallery by Mary Haverstock.

We see then how illustrations in which the unique and common qualities of individuals from a culture group help one develop a positive and adequate self concept. Likewise, they serve to extend the reader's perception of others that are not identified as members of his or her own culture group. A picture is a window and it is through this window that the reader may get to know about individuals who are alike and different in race or ethnicity, who live life styles which are the same or differ from his own.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the literature made accessible to him or her. The beneficiary inasmuch as the illustrations and text of his books give him or her access to the accumulated records of the gamut of the human experience (one's own experiences as well as those of others). The victim insofar as the books (illustrations and texts) are records of the authors or illustrators awareness and interpretation of reality and will be available to the reader and will influence him or her only in terms of how the affective self and the cognitive self will respond to that illustrated literary selection. The goal is to provide illustrated literary selections in which the creators and the readers will communicate to the extent that the reader will acquire a positive and adequate (authentic) understanding of all individuals who make up our pluralistic society.

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